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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: TOUGH ENVIRONMENT FOR UZBEK JOURNALISTS

Classified By: IO Molly Stephenson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Journalists Fired for Participating in French Program

¶1. (C) Sobirjon Yakubov, commentator of GOU-controlled "Hurriyat" newspaper and Beggul Egamqulov, commentator on world affairs for the official GOU newspaper "Halq Sozi" were fired on March 18 for participating in a professional development program in France, much like State's International Visitor Program (IVP). They had been warned by their editors not to travel to Paris, but they left anyway. Despite the threats, we learned that they could initially resume their jobs. However, last week their editors cited National Security Service instructions prohibiting their return to work.

¶2. (C) Unfortunately, this is not the first GOU harassment Yakubov has faced. In 2005, he was detained for alleged connections to the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. His guilt was never proven and he was released after one year. According to Yakubov, the charges against him were fabricated and solely related to his professional activities.

¶3. (C) Thanks to a Democracy Commission Small Grant, in November 2007 Yakubov launched an Uzbek-language news website (www.newsuz.com) which features analytical materials and social, economic, and political issues in Uzbekistan. The site is currently accessible throughout the country. This modest grant will keep food on his table.

AP Denied Accreditation

¶4. (C) The Associated Press (AP) Stringer, Khusnitdin Kutbidinov, informed us on March 19 that he was formally denied his accreditation. This is the second request and the second denial. The refusal letter, which he will soon share with us, allegedly states that the GOU will press criminal charges if he files stories for AP from Uzbekistan. The GOU claims they will accredit AP, but not Kutbidinov because he previously headed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) operation in Uzbekistan.

¶5. (C) AP remains supportive of Kutbidinov's role in Uzbekistan. They asked for Embassy support in raising this issue to GOU officials. They argue that the GOU has no right to dictate AP's staffing decisions.

¶6. (C) Kutbidinov continues to send non-politically sensitive reports to AP's Moscow office. He recently forwarded information on the General Motors Joint Venture, Ambassador Norland's comments about small, positive steps the GOU has

taken in 2008 at the 2007 Human Rights Report Roll-out Roundtable, and the resumption of detention center visits by the International Committee for the Red Cross. He is getting good news stories out of Uzbekistan, not just the bad ones.

17. (C) Comment: These developments are troubling, particularly as Post plans for two IVPs with Uzbek journalists this summer. This harassment directly contradicts Uzbek President Karimov's personal call on election day, December 23, 2007, for greater press freedom, travel of Uzbek journalists abroad, and the end of journalists' self-censorship. This is yet another example that upper Government of Uzbekistan leadership's commands are enforced quite differently on the ground. The timing suggests there is a possibility the harassment was in response to the roll-out of our 2007 human rights report and to the listing of Uzbekistan by the press as a "top 10" offender, something Foreign Minister Norov told the Ambassador constituted an "unfriendly act" by the U.S. If this is a case of petulant retaliation by the GOU, it will backfire in the long run. It could also be an isolated event, or an example of the NSS throwing its weight around. Either way, Post will work to provide whatever support possible to journalists who strive to promote press freedom in Uzbekistan.

NORLAND